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021807Z Apr 03

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MONTREAL 000453

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SMIG](#) [SOCI](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: Census Data Shows Quebec More Bilingual Since 1996, Mostly Due to Montreal Demographics

This cable was jointly prepared by Montreal and Quebec City Consulates.

1. SUMMARY: Statistics Canada (Statscan) has released several tranches of 2001 census data in the last four months regarding language usage and immigration, figures which are closely watched in Quebec, by both the media and government. The Statscan numbers show Quebec to be 3 percent more bilingual than in 1996, but provincial statistics suggest that bilingualism is mostly a Montreal area phenomenon. END SUMMARY

2. Statscan's 2001 census data, reveals Montreal was home to 12 percent of all new immigrants to Canada between 1991 and 2001. While Haiti was the top individual country of birth for immigrants to Montreal in the 1990s, accounting for 6.6 percent or 14,200 of the immigrants arriving during the decade, Arab countries were the birth places of 29 percent of immigrants who settled in Montreal during the 10-year period. Algeria, Lebanon and Morocco were the top three countries of origin for immigrants to Montreal. While Quebec as a whole admitted 37,498 immigrants in 2001, a 15 percent increase over the previous year, according to the provincial Ministry of Citizen Relations and Immigration, the provincial capital only received 1,500.

3. The Statscan data also showed Quebec's population to be 40.8 percent bilingual, 3 percent more bilingual than it was at the time of the 1996 national census, while French language usage in Montreal also inched up. According to Statscan, the 2001 Census data showed that French language usage is rising on the island of Montreal, marking the first upturn after a 30-year downward spiral. The proportion of Montrealers who speak French at home inched up to 56.4 percent in 2001 from 55.6 percent in 1996. In comparison the Anglophone population in Montreal decreased to 17.7 percent in 2001 from 18.9 percent in 1996.

4. Jack Jedwab, executive-director of the Montreal-based Association for Canadian Studies, told us there are a number of reasons behind the shifts in language usage. First, he believes young Anglophones are continuing to leave the province in search of job opportunities where bilingualism is not so necessary. Secondly, more Anglophones are marrying into French-speaking families, and adopting French as the language used at home. But most importantly, according to Jedwab, there has been a sharp increase in the Montreal allophone community's usage of French. (Allophone is the term used in Canada to denote someone whose mother tongue is neither English nor French.)

5. Statscan said that Allophones in Montreal increased to 29.1 percent of the population from 27.7 percent in 1996, while both the French- and English-mother tongue populations decreased accordingly. Among allophones, usage of French at home has increased almost four percent to 20.4 percent in 2001 from 16.6 percent in 1996. Meanwhile, the use of English at home by allophones dropped slightly from 24.1 percent in 1996 to 22.1 percent in 2001. These numbers reflect the fact that in Quebec, children whose parents are allophones are required to attend French language schools.

6. Bilingualism is not nearly as widespread in the francophone heartland of Quebec, including the capital. Institut de la Statistique du Quebec (ISQ) data shows the level of bilingualism in Quebec City at only 5.6 percent; the provincial capital is 96.7 percent French speaking. According to 2001 ISQ figures, 44 percent of the population in Northern Quebec is francophone, 3.4 percent is anglophone, and 52.6 percent speaks another language, mainly Cree or Inuktitut. With a population of less than 40,000, the northern Quebec region (covering three quarters of the province's land mass) remains first in Quebec in terms of the proportion of people whose mother tongue is neither French nor English. Of all the regions, the Saguenay holds the highest percentage of population whose maternal language is French at 98.6 percent.

7. In Quebec, 50.4 percent of Allophones are able to speak both national languages. But Allophones also continue to use their mother tongues. According to the 2001 census, Italian is still the most popular third language spoken in

real terms, but Arabic saw the most growth. During the five years between 1996 and 2001, the number of Arabic speakers increased by 29 percent. And for the first time, Arab-speakers surpassed Spanish-speakers in their numbers in Montreal. The Arab/West Asian minority in Quebec has now become the second largest minority after Blacks. StatsCan counted 123,580 persons broadly-defined as Arabs living in Montreal in the 2001 census, up from 96,240 in 1996. However, the census permits respondents a wide range of choices, including "Canadian," in identifying their origins; we have seen widely varying estimates on the actual numbers of Arab-origin Montrealers.

18. The Quebec government continues to try to attract more immigrants and encourages them to establish outside the Greater Montreal area. The outgoing PQ Cabinet Minister Joseph Facal told us last year the province is trying to increase its annual intake of immigrants to 45,000 over the next 2-3 years. Presently, the volume of immigrants living outside Montreal is only 15 percent but the aim is to increase that level to 25 percent. Quebec targets francophones from North Africa, Europe and Asia; however, about half the immigrants who come to the capital are from Eastern Europe. Jobs remain a problem but the Quebec authorities are trying to place "visible minorities" in government jobs, with a target of 33 percent for new hires in Montreal, 25 percent in Quebec City and 8 percent elsewhere in the province. Currently placement is around 3.4 percent of the province's 60,000 civil servants. The further north, the less immigrants: Nunavik (Northern Quebec), comprising 55 percent of the entire Quebec territory, attracted the least number of newcomers in 2001-02 with only 2 immigrants, followed by the North Shore (8), and the Gaspé region (13).

19. Quebec immigration recruitment policies do appear to have had a positive effect on the increase of French usage in Quebec. The Census revealed that 49 percent of all new immigrants to Quebec speak French or English, compared to the Canadian average of 39 percent who speak either of the two official languages. However, Alain Jean-Bart, former president of S.O.S.-Racisme (the Quebec chapter of the international anti-racism group), complained to us that the Quebec government selectively recruits Francophone immigrants (sidestepping would-be immigrants from West Africa, for example) while recruiting so-called "francophonisable" peoples in Latin American countries. S.O.S. Racisme has worked to counter stereotypical notions that Chinese and other immigrants are not francophonisable, i.e. not integrating into or contributing to the life of the province. An official from the Ministry of Citizen Relations and Immigration recently confirmed that the GOQ has focused lately on recruiting immigrants from Argentina but he implied that the MRCI is merely exploiting the difficult economic situation there to bring skilled, educated workers to Quebec.

110. Despite successes in Quebec's efforts to attract French speakers, Census 2001 revealed that Montreal remains third after Toronto and Vancouver in attracting new immigrants. Of the 1.8 million immigrants who arrived in Canada during the 1991-2001 period, only 12 percent settled in Montreal, while 56 percent went to Toronto and 20 percent settled in Vancouver. Quebec continues to have difficulties in retaining new immigrants. Statscan reported a net migration loss for Quebec of 57,000 people from 1996 to 2001, representing a net loss of 0.9 percent. While these numbers may reflect migration that occurred following the 1995 referendum on Quebec independence, the population decrease remains surprising given Quebec's economic resurgence of 1999-2001.

111. Quebec had the sixth highest rate among Canadian provinces of foreign born residents with 10 percent of its population in 2001 born outside Canada. Quebec also has fewer visible minorities - only 7 percent of its population -- than the other high-population provinces. Quebec Premier Bernard Landry, commenting on the Statistics data was quoted as saying, "Quebec must have more immigrants, for obvious reasons. The land is vast, our natural rate of growth is low. So families, children, people are a priority for us, including those families and people coming from immigration."

112. The Association for Canadian Studies' Jedwab believes that for Quebec to both attract and keep immigrants, not only does the economy have to continue strong, but the GOQ needs to find more ways to involve immigrants in civil society institutions such as city council, school boards and the civil service. "Give these people [immigrants] a sense that they have a meaningful role in Quebec," he says. Minister Facal announced last month a plan to hold provincial government agencies more accountable for minority hiring. Under the new proposal, Department heads will be required to publicize their hiring strategies and report the results at legislative hearings.

13. Statistically, Quebec outperforms every other Canadian province on bilingualism, with the second closest being New Brunswick at 34.2 percent bilingual (the rest of the provinces all have bilingual populations less than the national average of 17.7 percent). Quebec's rate of bilingualism at 41 percent is approaching the Western European rate of 47 percent. As Jedwab points out, "without the important numbers of bilingual persons in Quebec, the rest of Canada would rank in the lower end of the spectrum with the United Kingdom and the U.S." Ironically, bilingualism has been a federal, not a provincial goal. The Chretien government's recent announcement of a C\$751 million infusion into French language instruction throughout Canada was met mostly with indifference in Quebec.

14. COMMENT: When you look at the political map of Quebec, it is the central Quebec, francophone areas that remain the most traditional and in the past, most tied to the Parti Quebecois. Our contacts noted that, despite impending provincial elections, the release of the 2001 statistics on bilingualism did not create the same angst in the Quebec media and among politicians as in 1996, when the statistics came out a year after the 1995 referendum on independence. In fact, Landry has publicly acknowledged that it has become a rarity to see an anglophone less than age 50 who does not speak French. While the province is not at the point of embracing bilingualism as a goal, even the Parti Quebecois realizes that for Quebec to sustain demographic and economic growth, the province needs new blood, and not just in Montreal. END COMMENT  
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